

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 705

HE 014 274

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TITLE How High School Students Select a College.
PUB DATE [81]
NOTE 39p.; Not available in paper copy due to marginal legibility of original document.

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Aspiration; Career Planning; College Admission; *College Applicants; College Attendance; College Bound Students; *College Choice; College Students; *Decision Making; *Enrollment Influences; Higher Education; High School Seniors; *High School Students; Institutional Characteristics; Occupational Aspiration; *Student Attitudes; Student Characteristics

IDENTIFIERS *Pennsylvania State University

ABSTRACT

The college selection process used by high school students was studied and a paradigm that describes the process was developed, based on marketing theory concerning consumer behavior. Primarily college freshmen and high school seniors were interviewed, and a few high school juniors and upper-level college students were surveyed to determine whether their views of the process were substantially different. In addition, six sets of parents and seven high school guidance counselors were interviewed. The college student respondents were drawn from the main campus of Pennsylvania State University and from six of its branch campuses. Findings reveal that the college selection process for study respondents fell into six phases: the decision to attend college, the development of a list of colleges, the application decision, the applications process, receipt of acceptances, and the final college choice. High school students considered the academic program, cost, location, and views of parents, guidance counselors, and alumni. It was found that the college selection process is closely intertwined with the selection of a vocation and the choice of a high school curriculum. Most respondents set their career goals first and then, based on the education required to achieve these goals, decide which high school curriculum to enter and whether or not college is needed. It was also found that the college selection process is neither well executed nor well informed. In general, students with higher Scholastic Aptitude Test scores and college-educated parents were more likely to enter each phase of the decision process earlier, and tended to be less influenced by pragmatic factors such as cost and location and more interested in the institutions' academic programs. A bibliography and sample questionnaire is appended. (SW)

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How High School Students

Select a College*

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*The assistance of Ruth C. Hollinger, Walter E. Markle and Robert
 D. Newton in the conceptualization of this study and in carrying out
 interviews is gratefully acknowledged.

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Abstract

The paper reports on an exploratory study, grounded in marketing theory, of the college selection process of high school students. The study's purposes were: 1) to learn more about the processes by which high school students select a college, and 2) to develop a paradigm which describes the process.

1. THE PROBLEM

This paper reports on an exploratory study of the college selection process of high school students. The study's purposes were: 1) to learn more about the process by which high school students select a college, and 2) to develop a paradigm which describes this process.

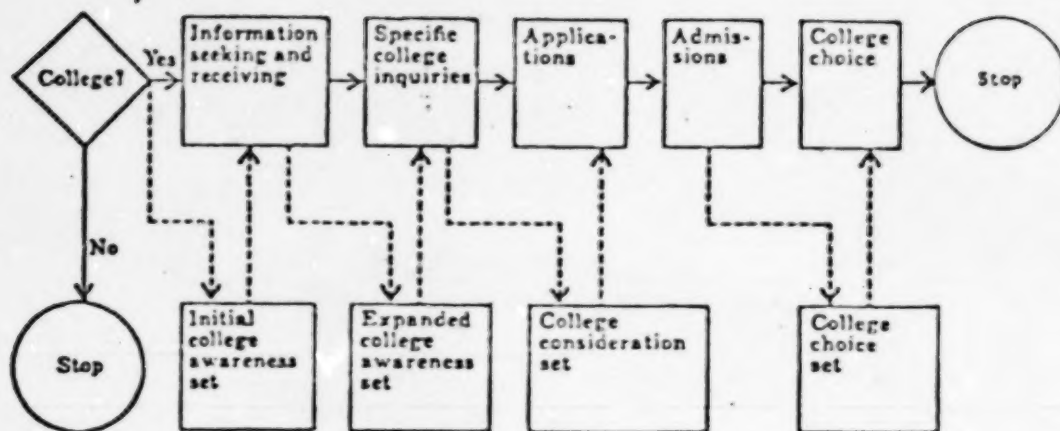
The study was grounded in marketing theory concerning consumer behavior (9). This theory maintains that colleges and universities need to know 1) how and when their students decide to enroll in their programs, 2) who and what influences them in their decision, and 3) what sources of information they use in making that decision. Without such information, the marketing theorists assert, postsecondary educational institutions cannot target their admissions and recruiting efforts in an effective way to the high school students they hope to recruit and admit.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature on high school students' college selection processes falls into two basic categories: 1) descriptions of the process and 2) studies of the influences and factors considered by students in their college decision.

Kotler (10) has described the college selection process as being essentially funnel-like. The student starts with a broad conception of the higher education opportunities open to him and through a series of steps narrows and refines this perception into the choice of a single institution. The process consists of six phases which are described briefly below and shown in Figure 1. Kotler has not tested this paradigm empirically.

Figure 1. Kotler's Conception of the High School Student's College Selection Process.



1. College attendance decision. The initial step involves the decision whether or not to attend college. It is influenced primarily by the student's ability and socioeconomic status.
2. Information seeking and receiving. The student who decides to go to college starts with an "initial college awareness set," namely, those institutions about which he knows something before initiating an information search. As he progresses toward the end of his secondary education, he enlarges this set, often through systematic information seeking and receiving, into an "expanded college awareness set."
3. Specific inquiry. The student begins to send requests to specific institutions within the expanded set for catalogues and applications and may attend presentations by their representatives. This group of institutions is known as the "college consideration set."
4. Applications. The student sends applications to some or all of those institutions which are included in the college consideration set.
5. Admissions. The student receives offers of admission from some or all of the institutions to which he applied. These institutions are referred to as the "college choice set."
6. College choice. In the final step, the student chooses the college he will attend from the college choice set.

There are two basic streams of literature concerning the influences and factors considered by high school students in their college choice. The first is basically social psychological in orientation and includes survey research by Richards and Holland (12), Medsker and Trent (11), Tinto (13), Trent (14), American Council on Education (1), Fenske and Scott (7), and

Anderson (2). Taken together, these studies identify four basic types of influences and factors considered by students in their decision making about college:

1. Academic program - reputation, quality, diversity, faculty training, etc.
2. Social climate - social life, athletic programs, fraternities and sororities, etc.
3. Cost and location - tuition, proximity to home, campus setting, etc.
4. Influences - parents, guidance counselors, alumni, teachers, friends, etc.

The second stream is based in economics and includes papers by Campbell and Siegel (3), Corrazini, Dugan and Grabowski (5), Dresch (6), and Kohn, Manski and Mundel (8). These studies, which used large national or regional data bases, provide general support for the notion that high school students maximize perceived cost-benefits in their college choice. However, further research by Carroll and Relles (4) indicates that the cost-benefits model does not hold at the institutional level.

The major weakness in both the social psychological and economics streams is that they do not tell us how and when these factors and influences are applied by students in the college selection process.

3. PROCEDURE

The study was designed as a piece of exploratory research. It addressed five research questions:

1. How do high school students decide to go to college?
2. How do they proceed from deciding to attend college to selecting a specific school?

3. Are there distinct phases in this process and what is their timing?
4. What sources of information and influences do students consider in these phases and how do these factors affect the students' decisions?
5. Do students with different attributes (e.g., ability, family background) differ in their college selection process?

A breakdown of the study sample is provided in Table 1. Most of the interviewees were college freshmen and high school seniors; it was believed that they would have the most detailed and accurate knowledge of the college selection process because of their closeness to it. A few high school juniors and college upperclassmen were surveyed to determine whether their views of the process were substantially different. They were not.

In addition, six sets of parents and seven guidance counselors (from the six high schools from which students were drawn for this study) were interviewed. The parental interviews corroborated those of their children and guidance counselor comments generally supported the results of the student interviews. Data from these groups thus are not discussed in the results section.

The college students included in the study were drawn from the main campus of the Pennsylvania State University and from six of its branch campuses. The branch campuses were selected to represent the major geographical regions of Pennsylvania and a balance between urban and rural settings. High school students were drawn from schools in the service areas of the branch campuses included in the study. The interviewees were drawn at random from both the campus and high school populations. The main and

Table 1

Study Sample

High School	
Seniors	29
Juniors	7
College	
Freshmen	58
Sophomores	3
Juniors	2
Seniors	1
Male	45
Female	55
Total	100

branch campus student samples were in the same proportion as the Penn State freshman class.

While the study sample cannot be viewed as being statistically representative of Pennsylvania's or the nation's college-bound population, it does draw from a broad range of high school students. This is because the Penn State system is so comprehensive and large that it draws from virtually every strata of the college-bound population within Pennsylvania.

Study interviews were carried out using in-depth interviewing techniques. The burden of each interview was on the respondent; the interviewer's role was limited to asking the respondent to describe his or her college selection process in as much detail as possible and to probing when clarification or additional information were needed. Interviewers were instructed to avoid "leading" the respondent through any part of the college selection process. A copy of the interview schedule appears in the Appendix.

Strenuous efforts were made to hold interviewer bias to a minimum. The six study interviewers were involved in pretests of the interview schedule, and these pretests were videotaped and critiqued by the entire staff of interviewers. In addition, periodic meetings of the interviewers were held during the course of the study to discuss any problems that emerged.

Because of the exploratory nature of the study, statistical analysis was limited to data coding and frequency and percentage computations. Computations on the variables were done for the following groups: all respondents ($n = 100$), males ($n = 45$), females ($n = 55$), high school students ($n = 36$), college students ($n = 64$), students with combined SAT scores of less than 900 ($n = 21$), 900 to 1100 ($n = 36$), and greater than 1100 ($n = 31$), students whose parents attended college ($n = 39$) and students whose parents did not ($n = 32$).

Analyses revealed no substantial differences between males and females or between high school and college students. Thus these groups are not discussed further in the paper in order to keep the amount of data presented to a minimum.

4. RESULTS

The analysis of study data revealed that the college selection process for study respondents fell into six phases: 1) the decision to attend college, 2) the development of a list of colleges, 3) the application decision, 4) the applications process, 5) receipt of acceptances, and 6) the final college choice. The major subdivisions of this section parallel these phases. These subdivisions, in turn, are in two parts: 1) description of the phase and 2) group differences.

The description of each phase includes information on timing, the number of institutions involved and primary information sources and influences considered. In the tables containing these data, a primary information source or influence is reported only if more than ten percent of the study respondents noted it. In addition, differences between groups listed in the tables are discussed only if they were greater than ten percent. Analyses of secondary information sources and factors and influences were also completed. They are not included in the tables, however, because they supplied very little information in addition to that provided in the listings of primary information sources or factors and influences.

The Decision to Attend College

Description of the phase. The decision to attend college is a long-term process. As shown in Table 2, it began for most respondents in grade

Table 2
The Decision to Attend College

	All Re- spondents %	SAT <900 %	SAT 900-1100 %	SAT >1100 %	Parents with some College %	Parents without College %
<u>Timing of First Thoughts about College</u>						
Grade School	64	52	51	75	74	53
Junior High	18	18	29	10	16	25
Senior High	17	30	15	15	10	22
Other**	1	0	5	0	0	0
<u>Timing of Decision to Go to College</u>						
Junior High	17	15	14	20	19	18
Sophomore-High School	39	40	36	45	39	39
Junior-High School	34	35	43	30	31	36
Other**	10	10	7	5	11	7
<u>Primary Influences</u>						
Parents	36	32	45	30	52	23
Career	36	26	32	40	24	54
High School Program				15	14	12
Relatives		11				
Guidance Counselor		11				
Self		11				
Other**	28	9	23	15	10	11

*Percent citing the variable

**Includes all variables comprising less than ten percent of the total.

school (64 percent) and extended through the sophomore and junior years of high school (73 percent).

The decision is closely intertwined with the selection of a vocation and the choice of a high school curriculum. Most respondents said that they set their career goals first, probably accounting for the strong influence of the career factor (36 percent) noted in Table 2. Then, based on the education required to achieve these goals, they decided which high school curriculum to enter and whether or not college was needed. It should be stressed that the sharpness of career goals varied: one High school junior planned to enroll in the six-year medical program at Duke or Stanford in internal medicine while a college freshman indicated that he was attending Penn State because he "wanted something better and it included college."

Many respondents indicated that their parents made the decision that they were going to college for them. This probably explains why parents were perceived by a high proportion of the respondents (36 percent) as being a primary influence. In this stage, parents also generally defined the cost, geographic and quality boundaries within which the respondents were to remain in making their college selection. Although parents were not cited as a strong influence in succeeding phases, this boundary setting had a subtle but pervasive effect throughout the remainder of the college selection process.

Although most respondents had good information available to them on their aptitude for college, very few had information of comparable quality to support their selection of a career. The study interviewers had the feeling that the information on which vocational decisions were based was extremely limited and frequently inaccurate and out-of-date.

Few respondents mentioned taking occupational interest inventories and even fewer exhibited a clear understanding of what systematic decision making about careers would entail.

Group differences. Respondents with combined SAT scores over 1100 were more likely to think about college early (75 versus 52 percent thought about it in grade school) than their less able counterparts. In addition to considering college earlier, students whose parents had attended college were more likely to consult with their parents (52 versus 23 percent cited them as a primary influence) than those whose parents had not.¹

Developing a College List

Description of the phase. As Table 3 reveals, a large proportion (72 percent) of study respondents developed their college lists in their junior year of high school. In the interviews, we learned that the process was often triggered by the PSAT exams in the fall, the SATs in the spring, or a reminder from their guidance counselor.

Most respondents entered the phase with a casual awareness of colleges in their local area and of state-wide institutions like Penn State. Most began concentrated development of their college lists, however, with a visit to the guidance counselor's office or the college information center in the counselor's office. It was here that a search for institutional options occurred for most respondents. It was also the one place where objective sources of information about colleges like the Barrons and Lovejoy's Guides were available and consulted. After identifying some options, many respondents wrote colleges requesting information and some even made campus visits.

Table 3
Developing a College List

	All Re- spondents %*	SAT <900 %	SAT 900-1100 %	SAT >1100 %	Parents with some College %	Parents without College %
<u>Timing</u>						
Before Junior Year	11	6	10	13	8	19
Fall-Junior Year	29	22	36	27	33	33
Spring-Junior Year	43	56	42	40	42	44
After Junior Year	17	16	12	20	17	4
<u>Primary Information Sources</u>						
Guidance Counselor	44	29	33	57	35	49
College	27	24	29	33	41	26
Relatives		19	18			
Friends		14				
Parents					14	0
Other**	29	14	20	10	10	25
<u>Primary Factors & Influences</u>						
Programs	40	33	36	52	42	31
Costs	15	19	14		13	25
Parents					13	3
Location			11			
School Size		14				
Other**	45	34	39	48	32	44
<u>Number of Colleges</u>						
1-2	16	19	23	3	8	22
3-4	47	47	50	42	49	47
5-6	28	24	22	45	38	19
>6	9	10	5	10	5	12

*Percent citing the variable

**Includes all variables comprising less than 10 percent of the total.

Most respondents used a process similar to the one described in this paragraph to determine whether they would place a college on their list or not. First, they established geographic and cost limits.² For less able and less affluent students, the institution had to be close to home; for middle-range students it had to be far enough away to enable them to break away from home but not too far; and for high ability students there were no real geographic limits except that the institution could not be too close to home. Cost limits were generally set in the form of ceilings on annual tuition and board charges. Once the institution passed the geographic and cost tests, the most important question was asked: Did the institution have the type and quality of programs desired? If the answer was yes, the institution was generally placed on the respondent's list. Most respondents (75 percent) ended up with a roster of three to six institutions.

It should be stressed that the actual process of developing a list of colleges was not as systematic for most students as the one described in the paragraph above. The search for college options was not far ranging or methodical and criteria frequently were applied inappropriately and inconsistently from institution to institution. Respondents often appeared to have inaccurate or sketchy information about academic programs and most made cost comparisons without considering financial aid. Finally, many indicated that no college provided a good picture or "feel" of what it was like to be a college student both in and outside of the college classroom.

Group differences. There were several differences between students with over 1100 composite SAT scores and those with lower scores. Students with high Board scores were more likely to consult with guidance counselors (57 versus 31 percent), give greater weight to program factors (52 versus

35 percent) and to have a more lengthy list of schools (five or more versus one-four).

Differences also occurred between students whose parents attended college and those whose parents did not. Students whose parents attended were more likely not to consult with guidance counselors (35 versus 49 percent), to write directly to colleges for information (41 versus 26 percent), to consult with their parents (14 versus 0 percent), to give greater weight to program concerns (42 versus 31 percent) than cost factors (13 versus 25 percent), and to develop a longer list of colleges to be considered (three-six versus one-four).

Making Application Decisions and Submitting Applications

Description of the phase. After developing lists of colleges in their junior year, most respondents mulled them over during the summer. They returned to high school in the fall faced with the task of deciding which schools they wanted to apply to and making applications to them. As shown in Table 4, the application process for the preponderance of respondents (66 percent) occurred in the fall of their senior year.

For most, application decisions involved cutting college lists from four to two institutions. These cuts were made considering the same factors--programs, costs and location--used in determining college lists. The weighting of the factors changed, however, with programs declining in significance (31 versus 40 percent) and costs (24 versus 15 percent) and location (12 versus 7 percent) assuming somewhat greater importance.

Probing during the interviews revealed that respondents collected little or no additional information during this phase about the institutions they were considering. They continued to use the same inadequate information they used in developing their college lists.

Table 4
Deciding on Which Colleges to Apply to

	All Re- spondents %	SAT <900 %	SAT 900-1100 %	SAT >1100 %	Parents with some College %	Parents without College %
<u>Timing</u>						
Fall-Senior Year	66	56	67	77	75	57
Winter-Senior Year	12	11	15	15	6	18
Spring-Senior Year	9	28	4	4	3	7
Other**	13	5	14	4	16	18
<u>Number of Applications Submitted</u>						
One	40	67	31	26	31	38
Two	21	10	31	26	18	31
Three	25	10	25	42	28	16
Four or More	7	10	8	6	16	3
Other**	7	3	5	0	7	12
<u>Primary Factors and Influences</u>						
Programs	31	30	27	39	31	21
Costs	24	25	15	26	22	36
Location	12		18			14
Parents		0	12	7	11	4
School Size		20				
Other**	33	25	28	35	36	29

*Percent citing the variable.

**Includes all variables comprising less than ten percent of the total.

Group differences. Two differences existed between students with less than a 900 combined score on their SAT exams and those with higher scores. Those with scores lower than 900 were more likely to apply later (56 percent applied in the fall of the senior year versus 72 percent) and to apply to fewer institutions (67 percent applied to one institution versus 29 percent) than their more able counterparts.

Some differences between students whose parents attended college and those whose parents did not also existed. Students whose parents attended college were more likely to apply to college earlier (75 percent applied in the fall of the senior year versus 57 percent), to apply to more institutions (44 percent applied to three or more versus 19 percent), and to be less interested in cost factors (22 versus 36 percent).

Admissions and Final College Choice

Description of the phase. As Table 5 shows, most student respondents received word of admission in the winter (54 percent) or the spring (25 percent) of their senior year. Seventy-six percent were accepted at one or two institutions. (This represents a drop from the application rate where only 61 percent applied to one or two institutions.) Most respondents made their final college choice in the winter (35 percent) or the spring (52 percent) of their senior year, depending on when they heard from all of the institutions in which they had a genuine interest.

Respondents who were accepted at more than one institution tended to consider the same factors used in previous stages--costs, programs and location--in making their final college choice. However, in this phase, costs (22 percent) assumed dominance over program (20 percent) and location (12 percent) considerations. From the respondents'

Table 5
The College Choice

	All Re- spondents %	SAT <900 %	SAT 900-1100 %	SAT >1100 %	Parents with some College %	Parents without College %
<u>Timing of Acceptance</u>						
Fall-Senior Year	9	6	12	4	17	4
Winter-Senior Year	54	44	60	72	53	54
Spring-Senior Year	25	38	20	20	20	25
Other**	12	12	8	4	10	17
<u>Number of Acceptances</u>						
One	41	62	33	29	28	41
Two	35	29	39	48	41	34
Three	12	0	17	16	13	9
Four or More	5	5	6	7	11	3
Other**	7	4	5	0	7	13
<u>Timing of Final Choice</u>						
Winter-Senior Year	35	40	27	46	31	25
Spring-Senior Year	52	46	58	46	54	54
Other**	13	14	15	8	15	21
<u>Primary Factors and Influences</u>						
Costs	22	20	15	23	19	39
Programs	20	20	24	23	25	4
Location	12	5	12	13	8	14
Live at Home		15	9	3	3	11
Parents		0	12	3	11	0
Other**	46	45	37	41	45	36

*Percent citing the variable.

**Includes all variables comprising less than ten percent of the total.

description of the decision making in this phase, it was more systematic than that in earlier phases, and could best be characterized as a cost-benefits decision. They said they chose the institution which they perceived as providing the best educational benefits for the dollar, within the cost and location constraints they had set for themselves.

It should be stressed, however, that most respondents neither sought nor received additional information on the institutions to which they were admitted. In fact, most made their final college selection without information on the financial aid packages they would receive. Most apparently crossed their fingers, hoping they would get adequate support.

Group differences. Table 5 shows some differences between students with less than a 900 combined score on their SATs and those with higher scores. Students with scores of less than 900 were more likely to be accepted later (38 percent were accepted in the spring of their senior year versus 20 percent) and to be accepted at only one institution (62 versus 31 percent). The table also reveals that students whose parents attended college were more likely to make their final choice by winter of their senior year (70 versus 58 percent), to be accepted at two or more institutions (65 versus 46 percent), to place less emphasis on cost (19 versus 30 percent) and more on programs (25 versus 4 percent), and to consult with their parents (11 versus 0 percent) than students whose parents had not attended college.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This conclusions section is divided into three parts. The first reviews overall conclusions from the study. The second outlines a paradigm describing the college selection process of most high school students. The third briefly examines group differences within the study sample.

Overall Conclusions

The results of this study support many of the findings in the existing literature on the college selection process. These findings include:

1. Kotler's (10) notion that the college selection process is essentially funnel-like. The high school student starts with a broad conception of higher education opportunities open to him and, through a series of phases, narrows and refines this perception into the choice of a single institution.
2. The contention of the social-psychological literature that high school students consider certain basic factors and influences in their college choice including academic program, cost, location, parents, guidance counselors, and alumni.
3. The contention of the economics literature that the student's college selection is a matter of maximizing perceived cost benefits.

The study also provides some new insights. These include:

1. The college selection process is closely intertwined with the selection of a vocation and the choice of a high school curriculum. Most respondents set their career goals first and then, based on the education required to achieve these goals, decide which high school curriculum to enter and whether or not college is needed.
2. The college selection process is neither well executed nor well informed. The search for institutional options

is rarely far reaching or methodical, the information obtained is generally inadequate, and most respondents and their parents lack the requisite skills and knowledge to evaluate the information they obtain from colleges.

3. It appears that college selection generally occurs because the "system" forces it. The system is comprised of:
 - a. parents and relatives interested in seeing the student get ahead in life,
 - b. school systems and guidance counselors interested in assigning the student to the appropriate high school curricular track in accord with his or her ability,
 - c. the College Entrance Examination Board test sequence which forces the student to think about college and what institution he or she would like to attend, and
 - d. the institutions themselves with their application requirements and notification deadlines.
4. Although the college selection process is forced and constrained by the system described above, study results suggest that the actual selection of a college within the bounds set by the system is made by the student. It is generally the student himself who seeks out institutional options, makes out applications, and makes the final college choice.
5. Friends, particularly peers, were not viewed by study respondents as strong influences in their college selection. Many respondents apparently did not want their peers to know what institutions they were seriously considering in order to avoid embarrassment if they happened to be rejected.

The one exception to this rule was older friends who were attending an institution in which the respondent was interested. These persons often served as an important source of information about the institution.

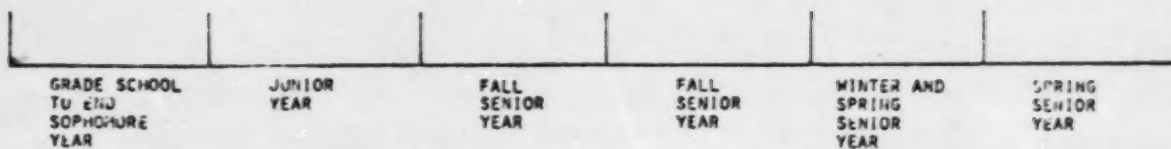
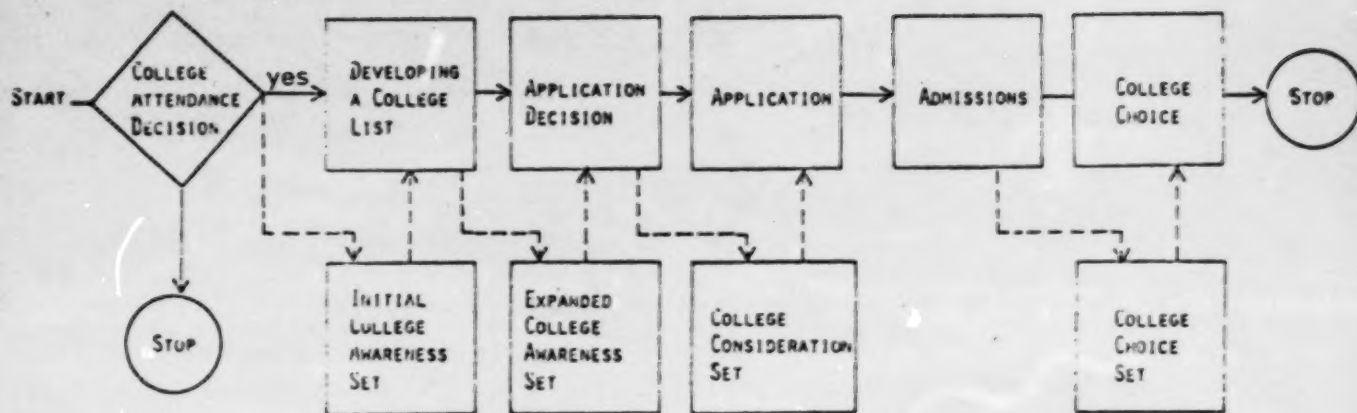
6. Extra curricular or social life was not a dominant factor in the respondents' college selection processes. Although we think they downplayed its importance because they felt interviewers from the Pennsylvania State University would want it that way, we believe a good social life for most high school students is "icing on the cake" if it exists and something to grumble about if it does not. The selection decision is a pragmatic one, based primarily on a program, cost and location considerations. This is not to say, however, that high school students do not want information on social life. They do.

A College Selection Process Paradigm

The study results provide strong general support for a college selection process paradigm much like that outlined by Philip Kotler (10). The process is essentially funnel-like, with the student starting with a broad conception of the higher education opportunities open to him, and through a series of steps narrows and refines this perception into a choice of a single institution. A diagram of the college selection paradigm emerging from the study appears in Figure 2. The steps depicted in the diagram are described in more detail in the sections below.

1. College attendance decision. The initial phase involved a decision whether or not to attend a college. It began

Figure 2. College Selection Paradigm Based on Study Results



in grade school and continued until the final decision was made in the sophomore or junior year of high school. The process is closely intertwined with decisions about a career and high school curriculum. Parents had the most influence in this phase. The information available to students on their aptitude for college was good, but that available to them on career opportunities was limited and frequently inaccurate.

2. Developing a college list. Although most respondents entered this phase with an "initial college awareness set," most could identify a period during their junior year in high school when they made a concerted effort to develop a list of colleges. Often these efforts were triggered by PSAT or SAT exams or a guidance counselor. Most respondents identified their guidance counselor's office, and the colleges themselves as their major sources of information. All found the information they obtained to be inadequate, yet for most this phase marked the last concerted search for information about colleges. Factors considered in determining whether a college made the list included program, cost and location.
3. Application decision. Respondents decided which of the colleges in their "expanded college awareness set" to apply to in the fall of their senior year. In general, the number of colleges included in this set were cut in half from four to two institutions. The cuts were made

considering the same basic factors--programs, costs and location--used in determining the list of colleges.

4. Application. Respondents then submitted applications to those colleges which they decided to apply to, shown as the "college consideration set" in Figure 2.
5. Admissions. Study respondents received offers of admission from most of the institutions to which they applied. These institutions were designated as the "college choice set" in Figure 2. In general, this notification came in the winter or spring of the senior year.
6. Final college choice. Most respondents made their final college choice in the winter or spring of their senior year, depending on when they heard from all the institutions in which they had genuine interest. Those who were accepted to more than one institution chose the school which they perceived to offer the highest quality program for the dollar.

Group Differences within the Study Sample

Differences between respondents with higher SAT scores and those with lower ones and respondents whose parents attended college and those whose parents did not were found in most phases of the college selection process. In general, students with higher SAT scores and college-educated parents were more likely to enter each phase of the process earlier, and tended to be less influenced by pragmatic factors such as cost and location and more interested in the academic programs offered by the institutions they were looking at. They also considered more institutional options in each phase and were influenced more by alumni and other college-educated persons.

It should be stressed that the conclusions contained in this paper are tentative because of the exploratory nature of the study and the limited nature of the sample on which it was based. Nevertheless, we believe the study does add to the literature on the college selection process and hope that its results entice others into doing further research in the area.

Footnotes

¹It should be pointed out that respondents whose parents attended college were no more able than students whose parents had not, as measured by SAT scores. This fact leads to the conclusion that the parents with and parents without college classifications provide information in addition to that pertaining to SAT scores.

²The location factor does not appear for all respondents in Table 3. This is because it was rated as a primary factor by only nine percent of the study population. However, it received the top rating, 21 percent, under secondary factors.

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APPENDIX

Interview Format for the Study of High School Student College Selection Processes

Name _____ Sex _____ Date _____

High School or Campus Location _____

Description of Interviewee _____

Instructions to Interviewee

Penn State would like to help high school students make the best college choice. One way we can do this is to find out what information students need, when they need it, and in what form it should be made available to them. To provide this assistance, we need to know more about how high school students actually decide on a college. You can help by telling us in detail how you chose a college. We have no "right" answers in mind; we want to know how and when you made your college choice, and how you felt when you were making that choice. If you would like, we would be happy to provide you with a copy of the results of this research study.

Opening Question

Now, think back to the time when you were making your college choice, (hesitate) beginning when you first started thinking about college and working forward in time, tell us how you went about selecting a college.

Part 1: College Attendance Decision

1. College First Considered
 - a. When? Why?
 - b. Influences - What? How? Who?
2. Decision to go to College
 - a. When? Why?
 - b. Influences - What? How? Who?

Part 2: College Awareness

1. Original Schools
 - a. Which ones? Why? When?
 - b. Influences - What? How? Who?
 - c. Information sources?

2. Additional Schools

- a. Which ones? Why? When?
- b. Influences - What? How? Who?
- c. Information sources?
- d. Success in getting information?
- e. Institutions with good information? Without?

Part 3: Application

1. Inquiries

- a. Applications requested - When? Where? Why?
- b. Additional applications requested - When? Where? Why?
- c. Influences - What? How? Who? When?

2. Applications

- a. When? Where? Why? Why not?
- b. Influences - What? How? Who? When?
- c. Application forms difficult? Where? Why?
- d. Fees limit applications? How many sent?

Part 4: Final College Choice

1. Acceptance notification

- a. When? Where? Where not?
- b. Financial aid package?
- c. Contacts before notification?
- d. Admissions processes?

2. Acceptance decision

- a. When and which did you choose?
- b. Influences - What? How? Who? When?
- c. Financial aid timing?
- d. Other important factors - What? When? Who?

Part 5: Post Admission

1. Contacts - When? Type?
2. Information - When? Type?

Part 6: Variables (if not covered by students)

1. Tests - Yes or No? When?

- a. PSAT's? SAT's? ACT's?
- b. Scores sent? Where? Why?
- c. Any changes? Where? Why?

2. Referrals to a Commonwealth Campus - Yes or No?
 - a. How did (would) you react?
 - b. Commonwealth Campus visits? Where? When?
3. College costs
 - a. How were costs determined?
 - b. Financial aid offers similar?
 - c. How important in final choice?
4. Influences
 - a. Where? What? Who?
 - b. When? How?
5. Location - Urban? Rural? Distance?
6. Institutional Environment - Size? Appearance?
7. Academic Programs - Diversity? Quality?
8. Job placement after graduation - Importance?